

The Robust Demands of the Good: Ethics with Attachment, Virtue, and Respect, by Philip Pettit

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this is not the same problem of unity with which McCabe has been concerned in this chapter. Hume doubts that there could be a principle of unity that would make the collection of perceptions anything but a collection. The puzzle that McCabe has raised goes beyond this. Her concern is with generating a unity that makes sense when the subject of the perception is the self-same thing as the object of the perception. That's a difficulty that can arise within a single perception as well as across perceptions. And so I think that the difficulties are distinct: Hume's worry is not the same as McCabe's.

Identification (and re-identification) happens when someone realises that $a = b$. That involves realising that two things that are presented as if they are different are really the same, as when one realises that the Morning Star and the Evening Star are really just different presentations of the planet Venus. Here we use Venus as a point beyond (or underlying) each presentation. It is difficult to do this with self-identification. If I am both the subject and the object of a perception, then I can't step outside myself to make the identification judgment. It seems that McCabe's suggestion of multiple perspectives is intended to help with this: by gathering multiple perspectives, I may be able to create the same effect as stepping outside myself even though I cannot in fact do so. But once again I do not think that this is Hume's concern. His point does not seem to be that we will only have a collection of 'this is me' perceptions, so much as the rejection that it would ever be possible to have a 'this is me' perception.

But my disagreement with McCabe on this point serves to cement the main point of *Platonic Conversations*. I was presented with a puzzle. Identifying it, and puzzling through it, causes me to engage further. So, I converse with McCabe (in the rather one-sided way in which one can converse with a text), but mostly I am conversing with myself. 'Does it mean this or this?', I ask myself. 'What would be the consequences of that?'

Do these conversations have an endpoint? McCabe says (Chapter 6, 'Is Dialectic as Dialectic Does?') that they can. When one's soul is no longer puzzled, and a unified view has been reached, then the discussion is over. But this endpoint is reached through dialectic—by engaging in carefully layered conversation.

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In *The Robust Demands of the Good* Philip Pettit brings to print a revised version of his Uehiro Lectures delivered in Oxford in 2011. Bristling with characteristic style, Pettit's book develops a novel and nuanced account of robustly demanding goods. In particular, he focuses on bilateral relational goods of attachment like love and friendship; multilateral relational goods of virtue like honesty and justice; and the multilateral relational good of respect as robust non-interference in the exercise of basic liberties.

Pettit's central thesis is that 'rich' or robustly demanding goods like love, honesty, and respect share structural commonalities in virtue of their requiring robust provision of corresponding 'thin' goods. The basic idea is this: in order for me to enjoy (the rich good of) your love, honesty, or respect, it will not be enough that you provide me with (the corresponding thin good of) your loving care, truth-telling, or non-interference merely actually—as things stand. It must also be the case (i) that you would still give me (the same thin good of) your care, truth-telling, or non-interference even were I/you/circumstances somewhat altered; and (ii) that your doing so be underwritten by an appropriate disposition.

The pattern of robust provision prescribed by (i) is reasonably intuitive, and the significance of (ii) readily demonstrated. Suppose that William has never been unfaithful to his wife Anne, but only because of some contingent factor: perhaps all other women find him repulsive, or maybe he is worried that were he caught cheating he would lose access to his children, or to Anne's wealth. We would surely not say that Anne enjoys the rich good of William's fidelity, irrespective of the fact that there is a perfectly good sense in which he has been robustly faithful. What Anne requires is that William acts out of an appropriately loving disposition—that he be moved indispensably by concern for her and not these contingent considerations. And whilst acting out of a disposition of virtue or respect differs (the former is not particularized [47–8] and the latter must be externally constrained by law in addition to being discretionarily constrained [94–7]), the underlying point generalizes nonetheless: if you provide me with the relevant thin good robustly, but are moved to do so by merely contingent considerations rather than by an appropriate disposition, that will not suffice for me to enjoy the corresponding rich good.

From this depiction of robustly demanding goods as disposition-dependent, Pettit derives what is in many ways the cornerstone claim of his thesis: that the quality of 'being good'—of acting out of appropriate dispositions of attachment, virtue, or respect—is in effect a requirement of 'doing good' [145–6]:

As is generally recognized, acting on these dispositions can play a practical role in facilitating your provision of the associated thin benefits, and an epistemic role both in signalling what they require of you and in providing an assurance to others that you will fulfil those requirements. But by our account they can also play an ontological role. Insofar as you act towards me out of those dispositions, you will ensure in a constitutive rather than a causal manner that I enjoy the rich goods corresponding to the dispositions.

So, rich goods like love, honesty, and respect are essentially a product—a constitutive non-detachable consequence—of their corresponding dispositions. In the absence of them, I could not enjoy your love, honesty, or respect at all, irrespective of the robustness of your care, truth-telling, or non-interference, just as Anne does not enjoy the good of William's fidelity, despite the fact that he has never actually been unfaithful.

In so far as 'doing good' requires 'being good', however, a familiar issue emerges concerning 'doing right'. The 'Guidance Problem' [206–18], as Pettit calls it, turns on the apparently ineliminable tension between acting out of dispositions of attachment, virtue, or respect on the one hand, and deferring to a general criterion of the right to guide decision-making on the other. The problem is that a friend who looked to the balance of overall reasons for guidance every time you asked something of her would necessarily be incapable of realising the rich good of friendship: indeed, she would scarcely be someone whom you could count as a friend at all. By way of a pragmatic

solution to this problem, Pettit proposes a standby strategy according to which people should ordinarily default to their dispositions of attachment, virtue, and respect, yet remain peripherally sensitive to ‘contextual cues’ or ‘red lights’ [220] that indicate when default dispositions should be suspended and the balance of overall considerations consulted [218–22]. Whilst this strategy is ostensibly adaptable to both consequentialist and non-consequentialist theories, Pettit unsurprisingly favours the former, and ends his book with the suggestion that a standby consequentialism that counts rich goods as consequences alongside thin goods would prove less revisionary, and thus less susceptible to the usual objections to consequentialism [224–36].

Whilst I find Pettit’s central thesis utterly convincing, certain of the finer details are not beyond question. Non-reductionists about reasons of love are liable to be suspicious of Pettit’s standby strategy for guiding right action, even if impartial justification is only required under the red lights. And whilst standby consequentialism arguably fares better than other versions of indirect consequentialism in some respects, certain worries seemingly endemic to such approaches remain. But the issue I want to consider for the remainder of this review focuses on love in particular (although I suspect the problem will recur, *mutatis mutandis*, for virtue, if not respect), and concerns Pettit’s delineation of what he calls the ‘The Range of Love’s Demands’ [14].

Love surely is robustly demanding, but just how demanding is it? Suppose that William is not the cad that I earlier painted him to be, but is instead lovingly committed to Anne. Whilst William’s loving care must be robust across some non-actual scenarios (say, in which Anne has differently coloured hair), robustness is clearly not required across all non-actual scenarios (say, in which Anne is abusive towards him). So, if robustness is required across only certain non-actual scenarios, which non-actual scenarios are they? And what distinguishes them from non-actual scenarios across which robustness is not required?

Pettit’s answer picks out three constraints: priming, support, and modesty. The ‘priming’ constraint requires William to provide Anne with care only in scenarios (actual or non-actual) that preserve the prompts to which he responds in offering Anne care [16]. Thus, William is required to comfort Anne in only those scenarios in which the prompt (‘Anne needs comforting’) is preserved. The ‘support’ constraint requires William to provide Anne with care only in scenarios (actual or non-actual) in which his reasons to do so are not outweighed by competing considerations under the red lights proviso [16]. So, if comforting Anne over some trivial thing required William to leave his parent’s deathbed, his care would not be required to be robust across that scenario. And the ‘modesty’ constraint requires William to provide Anne with care only in scenarios (actual or non-actual) in which his loving disposition towards Anne is not impaired or absent [28–9]. For instance, it would seem implausible to hold that Anne requires William’s care to be robust across a scenario in which he is comatose in order to enjoy his love here and now.

If our earlier intuition was correct, presumably these three constraints are satisfied in non-actual scenarios in which the only difference is Anne’s hair colour. So, for Anne to enjoy William’s love, it must be the case that his care would not lapse in non-actual scenarios in which her hair is not black (as it is actually is), but is instead yellow, brown, or carrot. But what if, in the non-actual scenario in which Anne’s hair is yellow, her fate mirrors that of her eponymous namesake in W. B. Yeats’s poem *For Anne Gregory*, of whom it is said, ‘NEVER shall a young man/Thrown into despair/By those great honey-coloured/Ramparts at your ear,/Love you for yourself alone/And not your

yellow hair? If yellow-haired Anne does not enjoy the rich good of love from William-in-the-non-actual-scenario-in-which-Anne-has-yellow-hair, on Pettit's line, it is simply not a non-actual scenario across which the care provided by William-in-the-actual-scenario-in-which-Anne-has-black-hair must be robust at all, since it fails the modesty constraint. What this means, then, is that, for Anne to enjoy William's love actually, it will not even suffice that William-in-the-actual-scenario-in-which-Anne-has-black-hair provides her with his care robustly across the other scenarios in which her hair is yellow, brown, or carrot. It must also be the case that William-in-the-non-actual-scenario-in-which-Anne-has-yellow-hair would provide her with his care if her hair were black, brown, or carrot; that William-in-the-non-actual-scenario-in-which-Anne-has-brown-hair would provide her with his care if her hair were yellow, black, or carrot; and that William-in-the-non-actual-scenario-in-which-Anne-has-carrot-hair would provide her with his care if her hair were yellow, brown, or black.

If this is correct, however, it seems that, in order for Anne to enjoy William's love actually, his care must be robust across all and only those scenarios (i) that satisfy the three constraints, and (ii) in which he is appropriately disposed to provide care robustly across all and only those scenarios (i) that satisfy the three constraints, and (ii) in which he is appropriately disposed to provide care robustly ... etc. In other words, the scenarios across which William's care must be robust in order for Anne to enjoy his love look to be just those scenarios in which she enjoys his love. And if this is indeed the culmination of Pettit's attempt to delineate the range of love's demands, it is bound to leave us somewhat unsatisfied, much as one suspects Anne would be were she to ask William, 'Would you still love me if my hair were not black, but was yellow, brown, or carrot?' and he were to reply, 'Yes, if I still loved you if your hair were not black, but was yellow, brown, or carrot.'

Perhaps, in the end, there is no non-circular way of settling this issue of *how* robustly demanding love must be, much as we more intuitively suspect that there is probably no non-circular way of saying how diachronically demanding it must be. But this in no way detracts from Pettit's supremely compelling and sophisticated articulation of the manner in which goods like love *are* robustly demanding. Indeed, once Pettit opens your eyes to the full gamut of robustly demanding goods, the experience is akin to looking at one of those pictures that initially appears to be just a pattern but in which you eventually see a dog: once you see it you cannot unsee it, and you cannot but wonder how you didn't see it before. Our lives are shot through with these robustly demanding goods, and any moral theory, consequentialist or otherwise, that does not see that, or sees it and ignores it, will be missing something of critical normative significance.

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